

THE HOLY GHOST—THE NEED OF THE AGE

NO. 1952

A SERMON
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“O you that are named the house of Jacob, is the spirit of the LORD straitened? are these his doings? Do not my words do good to him that walks uprightly?”
Micah 2:7.

BRETHREN, what a stern rebuke to the people of Israel is contained in the title with which the prophet addressed them—“O you that are named the house of Jacob”! It is as much as to say to them, “You wear the name, but you do not bear the character of Jacob.” It is the Old Testament version of the New Testament saying, “You have a name to live, and are dead.” They gloried that they were the seed of Israel, they vaunted the peculiar privileges which came to them as the descendants of God’s honored and chosen servant Jacob, but they did not act in the same way as Jacob would have acted. They were devoid of Jacob’s faith in JEHOVAH, they knew nothing of Jacob’s power of prayer, and nothing of his reliance upon the covenant.

The words of Micah imply that the descendants of Jacob in his day were proud of the name of “house of Jacob,” but that they were not worthy of it. Nothing is more mischievous than to cling to a name when the thing for which it stands has disappeared. May we never come to such a stage of declension, that even the Spirit of God will be compelled, in speaking to us, to say, “O you that are called the church of God!”

To be named Christians, and not to be Christians, is to be deceivers or deceived. The name brings with it great responsibility, and if it be a name only, it brings with it terrible condemnation. It is a crime against the truth of God if we dare to take the name of His people when we are not His people. It is a robbery of honor from those to whom it is due. It is a practical lie against the Holy Ghost. It is a defamation of the character of the bride of Christ to take the name of Christian when the Spirit of Christ is not among us. This is to honor Christ with our lips and disgrace Him by our lives. What is this but to repeat the crime of Judas, and betray the Son of man with a kiss?

Brothers and sisters, I say again, may we never come to this! Truths, not names—facts, not professions, are to be the first consideration. Better to be true to God, and bear the names of reproach which the adversary is so apt to coin, than to be false to our Lord, and yet to be decorated with the names of saints, and regarded as the most orthodox of believers. Whether named “the house of Jacob” or not, let us be wrestlers like Jacob, and like him may we come off as prevailing princes—the true Israel of God!

When the Lord found His chosen people to be in such a state that they had rather the name than the character of His people, He spoke to them of the Spirit of the Lord. Was not this because their restoration must come from that direction? Was not their evil spirit to be removed by the Lord’s good Spirit? “O you that are named the house of Jacob, is the spirit of the LORD straitened?”

I believe, brethren, that whenever the church of God declines, one of the most effectual ways of reviving her is to preach much truth concerning the Holy Spirit. After all, He is the very breath of the church. Where the Spirit of God is, there is power. If the Spirit be withdrawn, then the vitality of godliness begins to decline, and the energy thereof is near to dying out. If we ourselves feel that we are backsliding, let us turn to the Spirit of God, crying, “Quicken you me in your way.” If we sorrowfully

perceive that any church is growing lukewarm, be it our prayer that the Holy Spirit may work graciously for its revival.

Let us direct the attention of our fellow Christians under declension to the Spirit of God. They are not straitened in Him, but in themselves. Let them turn to Him for enlargement. It is He alone who can quicken us and strengthen the things which remain which are ready to die. I admire the wisdom of God here, that when speaking by the prophet He rebukes the backsliding of the people, He immediately directs their minds to the Holy Spirit who can bring them back from their wanderings, and cause them to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith they were called. Let us learn from this divine wisdom, and in lowly reverence and earnest faith let us look to the Spirit of the Lord.

In speaking to Israel upon the Spirit of God, the prophet Micah uses the remarkable language in our text, upon which I would now speak to you. “O you that are named the house of Jacob, is the spirit of the LORD straitened? are these his doings? do not my words do good to him that walks uprightly?” May the Holy Ghost help me to speak, and you to hear!

I. And first, I think we may consider these words to have been spoken TO DENOUNCE THOSE WHO WOULD CONTROL THE SPIRIT OF GOD. “Is the spirit of the LORD straitened?” Can you hold Him a captive, and make Him speak at your dictation?

On turning to the connection you will find that there were certain prophets sent of God to Israel who were unpopular. The message which they brought was not acceptable, the people could not endure it, and so we read in the sixth verse, “Prophesy you not, say they to them that prophesy: they shall not prophesy to them, that they shall not take shame.” The words of these prophets came so home to their consciences and made them so ashamed of themselves, that they said, “Do not prophesy—we wish not to hear you.” To these Micah replies, “Is the spirit of the Lord to be straitened by you?”

There were some in those days who would altogether have silenced the Spirit. They would banish all spiritual teaching from the earth, that the voice of human wisdom might be uncontradicted. But can they silence the Spirit of God? Has He not continually spoken according to His own will, and will He not continue to do so? Is He not the free Spirit who, like the wind, blows where He listeth? If the adversaries could have slain with the sword all the messengers of God, would He not have found others? And if these also had been killed, could He not out of stones have raised up heralds of His truth? While the Scriptures remain, the Holy Spirit will never be without a voice to the sons of men. And while He remains, those Scriptures will not be left without honest hearts and tongues to expound and enforce them.

Is it possible for men anywhere to silence the Spirit of God? They may be guilty of the crime because they desire to commit it, and attempt to do so, but yet its accomplishment is beyond their reach. They may “quench the Spirit” in this and that man, but not in those in whom He effectually works. The Almighty Spirit may be resisted, but He will not be defeated. As well might men attempt to stop the shining of the sun, or seal up the winds, or still the pulsing of the tides, as effectually to straiten the Spirit of the Lord.

***“When God makes bare His arm,
Who can His work withstand?”***

JEHOVAH speaks, and it is done—who shall resist His Word? When His Spirit attends that Word, shall it fall to the ground? “My word,” says He, “shall not return unto me void,” and all the sinners on earth and all the devils in hell cannot alter that grand decree. Every now and then there seems to be a lull in the history of holy work, a silence as of God, as if He were wearying of men, and would speak no longer to them.

But ere long, in some unexpected quarter, the voice of the Lord is heard once more—some earnest spirit breaks the awful silence of spiritual death, and again the adversary is defeated. Outbursts of the great spirit of life, and light, and truth come at the divine will, when men least look for them or desire them. When Jesus has been crucified, even then the Holy Ghost descends, and the victories of the cross

begin. No my brethren, the Spirit of the Lord is not silenced—the voice of the Lord is heard above the tumults of the people.

The apostate Israelites also tried to straiten the Spirit of God *by only allowing certain persons to speak in His name*. They would have a choice of their prophets and a bad choice too. See in the eleventh verse, “If a man walking in the spirit and falsehood do lie, saying, I will prophesy unto you of wine and of strong drink; he shall even be the prophet of this people.” They had a liking for preachers who would indulge their lusts, pander to their passions, and swell their pride with windy flatteries.

This age also inclines greatly to those who have cast off the restraints of God’s revelation, and utter the flattering inventions of their own boasted “thought.” Your liberal spirits, your large-hearted men, your despisers of the old and hunters after the new—these are the idols of many. As for those who would urge upon men separation from the world and holiness to the Lord, they are Puritanic, and out of date. In Micah’s days Israel would only hear false prophets, the rest they would not listen to. “What!” asks Micah “is the spirit of the Lord then to be shut up to speak to you by such men as you would choose? Is He not to speak by whomsoever He pleases?”

It is the tendency of churches in all ages to fetter the free Spirit. Now they are afraid that we shall have too many preachers, and they would restrain their number by a sort of trades-unionism. In certain churches none must speak in God’s name unless they have gone through a certain humanly-prescribed preparation, and have been ordained after a regulation manner. The Spirit of God may speak by the ordained, but He must not speak by others.

In my inmost soul I treasure the liberty of prophesying. Not the right of every man to speak in the name of the Spirit, but the right of the Spirit to speak by whomsoever He pleases. He will rest on some rather than on others, and God forbid that we should straiten His sovereignty! Lord, send by whomsoever You will send—choose whom You will to the sacred office of ministers of God. Amongst the poor and illiterate, the Spirit of God has had voices as clear and bold as among the educated and refined, and He will have them still, for He is not straitened, and it is the way of Him to use instruments which pour contempt upon all the vain-glory of men.

He anoints His own to bear witness for His truth by life and lip. These the professing church may criticize, and even reject, saying, “The Lord has not spoken by these,” but the Word of the Lord will stand, notwithstanding the judgment of men. God’s true ministers shall be owned of Him. Wisdom is justified of her children. The Lord’s Spirit will not be straitened or shut up by all the rules, and modes, and methods which even good men may devise. The wind blows where it listeth, and the power of the Spirit waits not for man, neither tarries for the sons of men.

Further, this people tried to straiten the Spirit of God *by changing His testimony*. They did not wish the prophets to speak upon subjects which caused shame to them. They bade them prophesy smooth things. Tell us that we may sin with safety. Tell us that the punishment of sin is not as overwhelming as we have feared. Stand up and be advocates for the devil by flattering us with “a larger hope.” Hint to us that, after all, man is a poor, inoffensive creature, who does wrong because he cannot help it, and that God will wink at his sins. And if He does punish him for a while, will soon set it all right.

That was the style of teaching which Israel desired, and no doubt they found prophets to speak in that manner, for the demand soon creates the supply. But Micah boldly asks, “Is the spirit of the LORD straitened?” Do you think that He will have His utterances toned down, and His revelation shaped to suit your tastes?

Brethren, let me ask you, do you imagine that the Gospel is a nose of wax which can be shaped to suit the face of each succeeding age? Is the revelation once given by the Spirit of God to be interpreted according to the fashion of the period? Is “advanced thought” to be the cord with which the spirit of the Lord is to be straitened? Is the old truth that saved men hundreds of years ago to be banished because something fresh has been hatched in the nests of the wise? Do you think that the witness of the Holy Ghost can be shaped and molded at our will? Is the divine Spirit to be rather the pupil than the teacher of the ages? “Is the spirit of the LORD straitened?”

My very soul boils within me when I think of the impudent arrogance of certain willful spirits from whom all reverence for revelation has departed. They would teach JEHOVAH wisdom, they criticize His Word, and amend His truth. Certain Scriptural doctrines are, indeed, discarded as dogmas of the medieval period. Others are denounced as gloomy because they cannot be called untrue. Paul is questioned and quibbled out of court, and the Lord Jesus is first praised and then explained away.

We are told that the teaching of God's ministers must be conformed to the spirit of the age. We shall have nothing to do with such treason to truth. "Is the spirit of the LORD straitened?" Shall His ministers speak as if He were? Verily, that same treasure of truth which the Lord has committed unto us we will keep inviolate so long as we live, God helping us. We are not so unmindful of the words of the apostle, "Hold fast the form of sound words," as to change a syllable of what we believe to be the Word of the Lord.

Certain of these backsliding Israelites went so far as *to oppose the testimony of God*. Note in the eighth verse—"Even of late my people is risen up as an enemy." It is sad when God's own people become the enemies of God's own Spirit, yet those who professed to be of the house of Jacob, instead of listening to the voice of the living God, began to sit in judgment upon His Word, and even to contradict the same. The worst foes of the truth are not infidels, but false professors. These men called themselves God's people, and yet fought against His Spirit.

"What then," asks Micah "is the spirit of the LORD straitened?" Will the Spirit of God fail? Will His operations on the hearts of men come to nothing? Will the truth of God be put to shame, and have no influence over human minds? Shall the Gospel be driven out of the world? Will there be none to believe it? None to proclaim it? None to live for it? None to die for it? We ask, with scorn, "Is the spirit of the LORD straitened?"

Brethren my confidence in the success of the old faith is not lessened because so many forsake it. "For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower thereof falls away: but the word of the Lord endures forever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you." If all the confessors of the faith could be martyred, even from their ashes, like a heavenly phoenix, the truth would rise again. The spirit of the Lord lives, and therefore the truth of God must live also.

Is not all truth immortal? How much more that which is the shrine of God! The Spirit's witness concerning the sin of man, the grace of God, the mission of Jesus, the power of His blood, the glory of His resurrection, reign, and advent—this witness, I say, cannot cease or fail. It is to be greatly lamented that so many have turned aside unto vanities, and are now the enemies of the cross, but fear not, for the victory is in sure hands.

O you that would control the Spirit of God, remember who He is, and bite your lips in despair. What can you do against Him? Go bit the tempest, and bridle the north wind, and then dream that the Spirit of the Lord is to be straitened by you! He will speak when He pleases, by whom He pleases, and as He pleases, and His Word shall be with power. None can stay His hand, nor say unto Him, "What doest thou?" Thus much upon the first use of our text.

II. The second use of it is this, TO SILENCE THOSE WHO WOULD CENSURE THE SPIRIT.

Some even dare to bring accusations against the Holy Spirit of God. Read the text again, "O you that are named, the house of Jacob, is the spirit of the LORD straitened? *are these his doings?*" If aught be amiss, is He to be blamed for it?

The low estate of the church, is that to be laid at God's door? It is true that the church is not as full of life and energy and power and spirituality and holiness as she was in her first days, and therefore some insinuate that the Gospel is an antique and an effete thing. In other words, that the Spirit of God is not so mighty as in past ages. To which the answer is, "Is the spirit of the LORD straitened? *are these his doings?*"

If we are lukewarm, is that the fault of the Spirit of fire? If we are feeble in our testimony, is that the fault of the Spirit of power? If we are weak in prayer, is that the fault of the Spirit who helps our

infirmities? Are these his doings? Instead of blaming the Holy Ghost, would it not be better for us to smite upon our breasts and chasten our hearts? What if the church is not “fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners,” as once she was, is not this because the Gospel has not been fully and faithfully preached, and because those who believe it have not lived up to it with the earnestness and holiness which they ought to have exhibited? Is not that the reason? In any case, are these His doings? Can you lay the blame of defection and backsliding, of lack of strength, of want of faith, at the door of the Holy Ghost? God forbid! We cannot blame the Holy One of Israel.

Then it is said, “Look at *the condition of the world*. After the Gospel has been in it nearly two thousand years, see how small a part of it is enlightened, how many cling to their idols, how much of vice and error, and poverty, and misery, are to be found in the world!” We know all these sad facts, but are these His doings? Tell me, when has the Holy Spirit created darkness or sin? Where has He been the author of vice or oppression? From where, come wars and fightings? Come they from Him? Come they not from our own lusts?

What if the world be still an Augean stable, greatly needing cleansing, has the Spirit of God in any degree or sense rendered it so? Where the Gospel has been fully preached, have not the words of the Lord done good to them that walk uprightly? Have not cannibals, even during the last few years, been reclaimed and civilized? Has not the slave trade, and other villainies, been ended by the power of Christian influence? How, then, can the Spirit of Christ, the spirit of the Gospel, be blamed? Will you attribute the darkness to the sun? Will you charge the filthiness of swine to the account of the crystal stream? Will you charge the pest upon the fresh breeze from the sea? It is quite as just, and quite as sensible.

No, we admit the darkness and the sin and the misery of men. Oh, that our head were waters and our eyes a fountain of tears, that we might weep day and night concerning these things! But these are not the work of the Spirit of God. These come of the spirit from beneath. He that is from above would heal them. He is not straitened. These are not His doings. Where His Gospel has been preached, and men have believed it and lived according to it, they have been enlightened, and sanctified, and blessed. Life and love, light and liberty, and all other good things, come of the Spirit of the Lord—

*“Blessings abound where’er He reigns;
The prisoner leaps to lose his chains,
The weary find eternal rest,
And all the sons of want are bless’d.”*

But some have said, “Yes, but then see *how few the conversions are nowadays!* We have many places of worship badly attended. We have others where there are scarcely any conversions from the beginning of the year to the end of it.” This is all granted and granted with great regret, but “Is the spirit of the LORD straitened? are these his doings?” Cannot we find some other reason far more near the truth?

O sirs, if there are no conversions we cannot fall back upon the Spirit of God, and blame Him. Has Christ been preached? Has faith been exercised? The preacher must take his share of blame. The church with which he is connected must also inquire whether there has been that measure of prayer for a blessing on the Word that there ought to have been. Christians must begin to look into their own hearts to find the reason for defeat.

If the work of God is hindered in our midst, may there not be some secret sin with us which hinders the operation of the Spirit of God? May He not be compelled by the very holiness of His character to refuse to work with an unholy or an unbelieving people? Have you never read, “He did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief”? May not unbelief be turning a fruitful land into barrenness? The Spirit Himself is not straitened in His power, but our sin has made Him hide Himself from us. The want of conversions is not His doing. We have not gone forth in His strength. We shake off with detestation

the least trace of a thought that should lay any blame to the Spirit of the Most High. Unto us be shame and confusion of face as at this day.

But it is also said that there is *a lack of power largely manifested by individual saints*. Where are now the men who can go up to the top of Carmel and cover the heavens with clouds? Where are the apostolic men who convert nations? Where are the heroes and martyr spirits of the better days? Have we not fallen upon an age of little men, who little dare and little do? It may be so, but this is no fault of the great Spirit. Our degeneracy is not His doing. We have destroyed ourselves, and only in Him is our help found!

Instead of crying today, “Awake, awake, O arm of the LORD,” we ought to listen to the cry from heaven which says, “Awake, awake, O Zion; Shake yourself from the dust, and put on your beautiful garments.” Many of us might have done great exploits if we had but given our hearts thereto. The weakest of us might have rivaled David, and the strongest among us might have been as angels of God.

We are straitened in ourselves. We have not reached out to the possibilities of strength which lie within grasp. Let us not wickedly insinuate a charge against the good Spirit of our God, but let us in truthful humility blame ourselves. If we have not lived in the light, can we marvel that we are in great part dark? If we have not fed upon the bread of heaven, can we wonder that we are faint?

Let us return unto the Lord. Let us seek again to be baptized into the Holy Ghost and into fire, and we shall yet again behold the wonderful works of the Lord. He sets before us an open door, and if we enter not, we are ourselves to blame. He gives liberally and upbraids not, and if we are still impoverished, we have not because we ask not, or because we ask amiss. Thus much, then, have I spoken, using the text to silence those who would censure the Spirit of God.

III. In the third place, our subject enters a more pleasing phase, while I use it TO ENCOURAGE THOSE WHO TRUST IN THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD. My brethren, let us this morning with joy remember that the Spirit of the Lord is not straitened.

Let this meet our trouble about *our own straitness*. What narrow and shallow vessels we are! How soon we are empty! We wake up on the Sabbath morning and wonder where we shall find strength for the day. Do you not sigh, “Alas! I cannot take my Sunday school class today with any hope of teaching with power. I am so dreadfully dull and heavy. I feel stupid and devoid of thought and feeling”? In such a case, say to yourself, “Is the spirit of the LORD straitened?” He will help you.

You purpose to speak to someone about his soul, and you fear that the right words will not come. You forget that He has promised to give you what you shall speak. “Is the spirit of the LORD straitened?” Cannot He prepare your heart and tongue? As a minister of Christ I have constantly to feel my own straitness. Perhaps more than any other man I am faced by my own inefficiency and inability to address such an audience so often, and to print all that is spoken. Who is sufficient for these things? I do not feel half as capable of addressing you now as I did twenty years ago. I sink as to conscious personal power, though I have a firmer faith than ever in the all-sufficiency of God.

No, the spirit of the Lord is not straitened. Still is that promise our delight, “My grace is sufficient for you.” It is a joy to become weak that we may say with the apostle, “When I am weak then am I strong.” Behold, the strength of the Lord is gloriously revealed, revealed to perfection in our weakness. Come, you feeble workers, you fainting laborers, come and rejoice in the unstraitened Spirit. Come, you that seem to plow the rock and till the sand, come and lay hold of this fact, that the spirit of the Lord is omnipotent. No rock will remain unbroken when He wields the hammer, no metal will be unmelted when He is the fire. Still will our Lord put His Spirit within us and gird us with His power, according to His promise, “As your days, so shall your strength be.”

This also meets another matter, namely, *the lack of honored leaders*. We cry at this time, “Where are the eminent teachers of years gone by?” The Lord has made a man more precious than the gold of Ophir. Good and great men were the pillars of the church in former times, but where are they now? Renowned ministers have died, and where are their successors? It is not an infrequent thing with the older brethren

for them to say one to the other, “Do you see the young men springing up who will equal those whom we have lost?”

I am not among those who despair for the good old cause, but certainly I would be glad to see the Elishas who are to succeed the Elijahs who have gone up. Oh, for another Calvin or Luther! Oh, for a Knox or a Latimer, a Whitefield or a Wesley! Our fathers told us of Romaine and Newton, Toplady and Rowland Hill—where are the like of these? When we have said “where?” echo has answered “where?”

But herein is our hope—the spirit of the Lord is not straitened. He can raise up standard-bearers for His hosts. He can give to His church stars in her firmament as bright as any that ever gladdened our fathers’ eyes. He that walks among the golden candlesticks can so trim the lamps that those which are dim shall burn with sevenfold splendor. He who found a Moses to face Pharaoh, and Elijah to face Jezebel, can find a man to confront the adversaries today. To equip an army of apostolic men would be a small matter to the Creator of heaven and earth.

Let us have no fear about this. He that ascended on high, leading captivity captive gave such large gifts unto men, that unto the end of the dispensation they will not be exhausted. Still does He give evangelists, pastors, and teachers, according as the need of the church may be. Let us cast away all fear as to a break in the succession of witnesses, for the Word of the Lord endures forever, and it shall never lack a man to declare it.

Brethren, the great truth now before us may prevent our being dismayed by *the peculiar character of the age in which we live*. It is full of a terrible unrest. The earthquake in the Riviera is only typical of a far greater disturbance which is going on everywhere. The foundations of society are quivering, the cornerstones are starting. No man can foretell what the close of this century may see. The age is growing more and more irreverent, unbelieving, and indifferent. The men of this generation are even greedier of gain, more in haste after their ambitions, than those that preceded them. They are fickle, exacting, hungering after excitement and sensation.

Here comes in the truth—“The spirit of the Lord is not straitened.” Was not the Gospel intended for every age, and for every condition of human society? Will it not meet the case of London and Ireland as well as the case of the old Roman Empire, in the midst of which it first began its course? It is even so, O Lord! Our fathers trusted in You. They trusted in You, and You did deliver them, and we with joyful confidence fall back upon the same delivering power, saying in our hearts, “The spirit of the LORD is not straitened,” He will bear us through.

But, then, sometimes we are troubled because of *the hardness of men’s hearts*. You that work for the Lord know most about this. If anybody thinks that he can change a heart by his own power, let him try with anyone he pleases, and he will soon be at a nonplus. Old Adam is too strong for young Melancthon. Our trembling arm cannot roll away the stone of natural depravity. Well, what then? The Spirit of the Lord is not straitened! Did I hear you cry, “Alas, I have tried to reclaim a drunkard, and he has gone back to his degradation”? Yes, he has beaten *you*, but is the Spirit of the Lord straitened? Do you cry, “But he signed the pledge, and yet he broke it”? Very likely *your* bonds are broken, but is the Spirit of the Lord straitened? Cannot He renew the heart, and cast out the love of sin? When the Spirit of God works with your persuasions your convert will keep his pledge.

“Alas!” cries another, “I hoped I had rescued a fallen woman, but she has returned to her iniquity.” No unusual thing is this with those who exercise themselves in that form of service, but is the Spirit of the Lord straitened? Cannot He save the woman that was a sinner? Cannot He create a surpassing love to Jesus in her forgiven spirit? *We* are baffled, but the Spirit is not.

“But it is my own boy,” cries a mother. “Alas! I brought him up tenderly from his youth, but he has gone astray. I cannot persuade him to hear the Word. I cannot do anything with him.” Dear mother, register that confession of inability, and then by faith write at the bottom of it, “But the spirit of the Lord is not straitened.” Have faith in God, and never let your discovery of your own weakness shake your firm conviction that with God all things are possible.

It seems to me to be a fountain of comfort, a storehouse of strength. Do not limit the Holy One of Israel, nor conceive of the Holy Ghost as bounded and checked by the difficulties which crop up in fallen human nature. No case which you bring to Him with affectionate tears and with an earnest faith in Jesus shall ever be dismissed as incurable. Despair of no man, since the Lord of hosts is with us.

“Ah well!” says one, “but I am oppressed with *the great problem which lies before the church*. London is to be rescued. The world is to be enlightened. Think of India, China, and the vast multitudes of Africa. Is the Gospel to be preached to all these? Are the kingdoms of this world to become the kingdoms of our Lord? How can these things be! Why, sirs, when I think of London alone, a world of poverty and misery, I see the sheer impossibility of delivering this world from the power of darkness.”

Do you prefer a theory which holds out no hope of a converted world? I do not wonder! Judge after the sight of the eyes and the hearing of the ears, and the thing is quite beyond all hope. But is the Spirit of the Lord straitened? Surely the good Lord means to convince the church of her own powerlessness, that she may cast herself upon the divine might. Looking around she can see no help for her in her great enterprise. Let her look up and watch for His coming that will bring her deliverance. Amid apparent helplessness the church is rich in secret succors.

If the Spirit of God shall anoint our eyes we shall see the mountain full of horses of fire and chariots of fire round about the servants of the Lord. Behold, the stars in their courses fight against our adversaries, the earth shall yet help the woman, and the abundance of the seas shall yield their strength unto God. When the time comes for the Lord to make bare His arm, we shall see greater things than these, and then we shall wrap our faces in a veil of blushing confusion to think that we ever doubted the Most High. Behold, the Son of Man comes, shall He find faith among us? Shall He find it anywhere on the earth? The Lord help us to feel in our darkest hour that His arm is not shortened!

IV. I must close by remarking that this text may be used TO DIRECT THOSE WHO ARE SEEKING AFTER BETTER THINGS.

I hope that in this audience there are many who desire to be at peace with God through Jesus Christ. You are already convinced of sin, but you are by that conviction driven to despondency and almost to despair. Now notice this, whatever grace you need in order to salvation the Holy Spirit can work it in you. You want a more tender sense of sin. Is the Spirit of the Lord straitened? Can He not give it to you? You want to be able to perceive the way of salvation; can He not instruct you? You want to be able to take the first step to Christ, you want, in fact, to trust Him wholly and alone, and so find peace in Him. Is the Spirit of the Lord straitened? Can He not give you faith?

Do you cry, “I would believe, but I cannot tell how”? The Spirit will help you to believe. He can shed such light into your mind that faith in Christ shall become an easy and a simple thing with you. The Spirit of God is not straitened. He can bring you out of darkness into His marvelous light. If you are quite driven from all reliance on your own natural power, then cry unto Him, “Lord, help me!” The Holy Spirit has come on purpose to work all our works in us. It is His office to take of the things of Christ and to show them to us. Yield yourself to His gracious direction. Be willing and obedient, and He will lead you into all truth.

Notice again, although you are under deep depression of spirit, and you feel shut up, so that you cannot come forth, yet the Spirit of the Lord is not straitened. He is not weighed down nor discouraged. His name is the Comforter, and He can comfort to purpose. What though you be today ready to lay violent hands upon yourself by reason of the trouble of your restless thoughts, yet is the Spirit of the Lord straitened?

Look you to the strong for strength, even to your God. Does not the Lord cry to you, “Look unto me, and be you saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is none else”? Your strength as well as your salvation lies in Him. When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. Trust you in the Lord forever, for in the Lord JEHOVAH there is everlasting strength. Trust, implicitly trust, for the Spirit of God is not straitened. Your despondency and unbelief are not His doings, they are your own. He has not driven you into this misery. He invites you to come forth from it,

and trust the Son of God, and rest in the finished righteousness of Christ, and you shall come at once into light and peace.

May I invite you to remember how many persons have already found joy, peace, and salvation by believing the teaching of the Spirit of God. In the text the question is asked, “Do not my words do good to him that walks uprightly?” Many of us can bear testimony today that the Word of the Lord is not word only, but power. It has done good to us. The Gospel has not only been much to us, it has been everything to us.

Personally, I do not believe and preach the Gospel because I have made a choice, and have preferred it to any other theory of religion out of many others which might have been accepted. No. There is no other truth to me. I believe it because I am a saved man by the power of it. The truth revealed by the Spirit has new-created me. I am born again by this living and incorruptible seed. My only hope of holiness in this life, and of happiness in the life to come, is found in the life and death, the person and merit, of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Give up the Gospel! I may when it gives me up, but not while it grasps my very soul. I am not perplexed with doubt, because the truth which I believe has wrought a miracle on me. By its means I have received and still retain a new life, to which I was once a stranger. I am like the good man and his wife who had kept a lighthouse for years. A visitor who came to see the lighthouse, looking out from the window over the waste of waters, asked the good woman, “Are you not afraid of a night when the storm is out, and the big waves dash right over the lantern? Do you not fear that the lighthouse and all that is in it will be carried away?”

The woman remarked that the idea never occurred to her now. She had lived there so long that she felt as safe on the lone rock as ever she did when she lived on the mainland. As for her husband, when asked if he did not feel anxious when the wind blew a hurricane, he answered, “Yes, I feel anxious to keep the lamps well-trimmed, and the light burning, lest any vessel should be wrecked.” As to anxiety about the safety of the lighthouse, or his own personal security in it, he had outlived all that.

Even so it is with me, “I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him against that day.” From henceforth let no man trouble me with doubts and questionings. I bear in my soul the proofs of the Spirit’s truth and power, and I will have none of your artful reasonings. The Gospel to me is truth. I am content to perish if it be not true. I risk my soul’s eternal fate upon the truth of the Gospel, and I know no risk in it. My one concern is to keep the lamps burning, that I may thereby enlighten others. Only let the Lord give me oil enough to feed my lamp, so that I may cast a ray across the dark and treacherous sea of life, and I am well content.

Now, troubled seeker, if it be so, that your minister and many others in whom you confide have found perfect peace and rest in the Gospel, why should not you? Is the Spirit of the Lord straitened? Do not His words do good to them that walk uprightly? Will not you also try their saving virtue?

In conclusion, just a hint to you. The words of God do good to those who walk uprightly. If they do no good to you, may it not be that you are walking crookedly? Have you given up all secret sin? How can you hope to get peace with God if you live according to your own lusts? Give up the hopeless hope. You must come right out from the love of sin if you would be delivered from the guilt of sin. You cannot have your sin and go to heaven. You must either give up sin or give up hope.

“Repent” is a constant exhortation of the Word of God. Quit the sin which you confess. Flee the evil which crucified your Lord. Sin forsaken is through the blood of Jesus turned into sin forgiven. If you cannot find freedom in the Lord, the straitness is not with the Spirit of God, but your sin lies at the door blocking up the gangway of grace. Is the Spirit of God straitened? No, His words “do good to them that walk uprightly,” and if you in sincerity of heart will quit your sin, and believe in Christ, you also shall find peace, and hope, and rest. Try it, and see if it is not so. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—EPHESIANS 3:8-21; 4:1-16

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—464, 958, 954

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